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ABSTRACT

The educational "Reports" of the 1980's are demanding change in the schools and change in the way we prepare teachers. Perhaps a marriage between some industrial practices and some education strategies is now appropriate since both are in the informational age. For the first time in history, industry has many personnel who do not physically touch their products. These people need supervision. Contingency management practices are being tried. There is a possibility that education could borrow from this theory and incorporate some of its components in our supervisory practices. This paper reviews some of these possibilities and applies them to supervision of student teachers. Teachers must be part of the change. They need to alter and discover what is going on in their own classrooms. Classroom research or action research could be a possible course to follow. This paper discusses one action research model and several suitable projects that student teachers have tried during their clinical experiences out in the field. (Author)

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A VARIABLE SUPERVISORY STRATEGY THAT INCLUDES ACTION RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The educational "Reports" of the 1980's are demanding change in the schools and change in the way we prepare teachers. Perhaps a marriage between some industrial practices and some education strategies is now appropriate since both are in the informational age. For the first time in history, industry has many personnel who do not physically touch their products. These people need supervision. Contingency management practices are being tried. There is a possibility that education could borrow from this theory and incorporate some of its components in our supervisory practices. This paper reviews some of these possibilities and applies them to supervision of student teachers.

Teachers must be part of the change. They need to alter and discover what is going on in their own classrooms. Classroom research or action research could be a possible course to follow. This paper discusses one action research model and several suitable projects that student teachers have tried during their clinical experiences out in the field.

A Variable Supervisory Strategy That Includes Action Research

In 1986, the Holmes group published "Tomorrow's Teachers" and Carnegie made its report. Prior to this in 1984, in Iowa, the "First in the Nation in Education" (F.I.N.E.) report was made and in 1983 a "Nation at Risk" report was released. All these studies have stated that education is in serious need of being reshaped and that it is the responsibility of teacher training institutions to accept this challenge. John Naisbitt wrote in his book, Megatrends, about what the new frontiers industry is facing now that it has left the industrial revolution and is well into the informational age. The fact that only 18½% of all employees physically touch the product is significant proof that industry is composed of a new breed of employee.

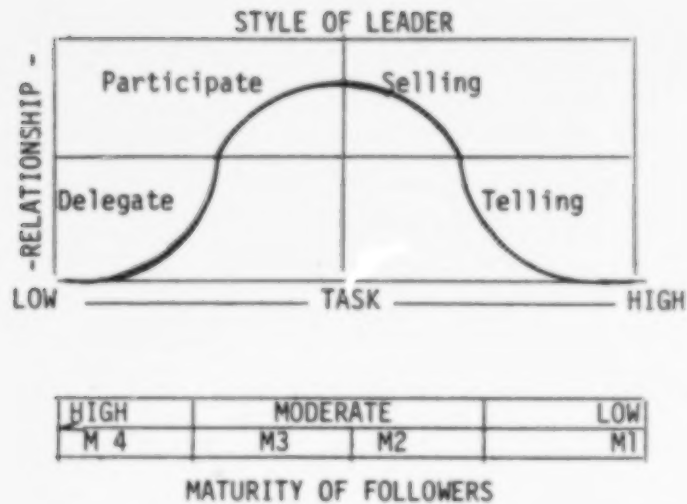
For the first time in our nation's history, industry and education have a very common problem. How do you supervise personnel who do not work with tangible products? The time is right for a marriage between managerial practices in industry and those used in education. A.N. Whitehead stated it nicely when he said, "Celibacy does not suit a university. It must mate with action," and John Dewey's statement is equally to the point, "Men have to do something to things when they wish to find out something; they have to alter conditions."

Those of us who supervise young educators out in the field are in an excellent position to incorporate change, i.e., marry with industrial practices of supervision. There is risk and conflict may develop if we change

current practices. If you ask an official question someone back on the campus will give you an official answer. There will be road blocks to innovations. It is easier to get forgiveness than it is to get permission is an adage field supervisors should quickly learn if they want to create change.

The challenge for supervisors is to find out how industry is working its way into the informational age. Business periodicals and articles written by CEO's seem to currently stress the following key words: 1. motivation of the employee, 2. subordinates = followers who need direction, and 3. "flex." Because situations vary, managers must have the ability to alter their supervisory techniques, i.e., practice "contingency management theory." Television and financial magazines have recently focused on how industry has rushed into this new style of leadership practice. The successful middle managers, according to a variety of business articles, have read a great deal about management theory. They have read Leadership by Burns, Managerial Effectiveness by Reddin, and they have closely looked at Management of Organizational Behavior by Hersey and Blanchard. Organizational Behavior in Education by Owens would be informative to most supervisors of student teachers.

The basic ingredients of contingency management theory or situational leadership are threefold. 1) The amount of guidance and direction (task behavior) a supervisor gives. 2) The amount of socio-emotional support (relationship behavior) a supervisor provides. 3) The readiness (maturity) level that followers exhibit in performing a specific task, function or objective. Graphically it would look like this:



For our purposes, we can substitute supervisor for leader and student teacher for follower.

The appropriate leadership style (style of the supervisor) for given levels of follower maturity is portrayed by the prescriptive curve going through the four leadership quadrants. The curve shows the appropriate leadership style directly above the corresponding level of maturity. Task behavior is the extent to which a supervisor provides direction for followers, i.e., telling them what to do, showing them how to do it, etc. Relationship behavior is the extent to which the supervisor engages in two-way communications: Providing support, encouragement, "strokes," etc. It means actively listening to followers and supporting their efforts. Maturity is a matter of degree. It is the willingness and ability of followers to take responsibility for directing their own behavior.

Telling is for low maturity. If followers are unable and unwilling often times they are not confident. Thus, if the supervisor will be directive and

provide clear, specific directions and leadership, there is high probability for being effective with followers of (M_1) maturity. Most student teachers during weeks one to three of their student teaching experience need to be supervised by a telling supervisor. This new environment warrants that supervisors use a telling style of leadership.

Selling is for low to moderate maturity. Followers who are unable but willing are more confident but lack skills at this time. In this situation, a successful supervisor provides directions because of followers lack of skills, but also they are supportive of behavior to reinforce willingness and enthusiasm. Followers at this level will usually go along with a decision if they understand the reason for the decision and if the supervisor will provide help and direction. During weeks 3 to 6, student teachers are acquiring effective teaching skills, they need lots of modeling. They are willing to learn so supervisors need to flex their style to a selling mode and drop out of a telling mode. As a supervisor, you expend a great deal of energy with followers who are functioning at the (M_1) and (M_2) maturity levels.

Participating is for moderate to high maturity. Followers at (M_3) are able but unwilling to do what or the way the supervisor wants things done. It is or because they do not understand why the supervisor wants things done in a particular manner. Their reluctance to perform is a motivational problem. The door to two-way communications must be opened at this time. The supervisor who encourages the student teacher to use the abilities he/she has and to be creative and to test his newly acquired style of teaching can now reduce his own modeling behaviors and can flex his supervisory procedures to include more relationship skills and less task skills.

Delegating is for high maturity. Followers who have both ability and willingness are at (M_4) maturity. Little direction and little support will be most effective. The responsibility for carrying out plans is given to these followers. They are permitted to run the show and decide how, when and where. During weeks 7 to 9, the supervisor, hopefully, can get out of the way and simply provide the student teacher with feedback about his teaching. It is the student teacher's duty to be reflective and to alter his own behavior or to ask for analysis and help from the supervisor.

Knowing the theory of industrial management is not enough. Or, as James Brubacher said, "Acquiring knowledge is incidental to inquiring into knowledge. Learning is an intimate transaction between a learner or knower and his/her environment and always takes place in a specific context."

Teacher education is the context of interest to all of us. Professors Good and Grouws point out that the most effective teachers are able to successfully diagnose the learner's problem and then they prescribe the specific treatment to increase the potential for learning for that individual. Madeline Hunter's research demonstrates this to be true also. It makes sense that the better we as supervisors can diagnose the maturity level of our preservice teachers, the greater the possibility is we will select a supervisory style that will allow them to grow under our leadership. It would help, too, if we treated them like adults and used androgogical methods of instruction instead of the pedagogical procedures we most often use.

Action Research

One project each student teacher has an opportunity to get involved in is action research. No matter what his/her maturity level is.

The focus of action research is an application of solutions to immediate problems. It is a process that includes planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The intent is to improve practice and understanding of teaching. A variety of methodologies may be used; however, due to the immediacy of it, action research results may not be generalized.

This component of the student teaching experience allows the classroom, the school, and the community to serve as a laboratory for study as well as a place for practice.

It is not enough to be an effective technician who practices mastery teaching procedures in the classroom by duplicating what they see their cooperating teacher doing. Above and beyond this, future professionals according to the "Reports" must also be willing to investigate the contingency situations that effect their teaching environment. They must be able to design a plan for investigating a problem which includes looking at alternatives and their consequences, determine a specific strategy so they can act, to observe, outcomes, and then they must be able to reflect on the entire process. Emerging professionals who have experiences in these areas will better be able to generalize about the process of education, will be more willing to experiment with "new" teaching procedures in the future and they will continue to be lifelong learning professionals. Ken Zeichner believes

the basic tenets to including action research inquiry into teacher education are "...to help persons develop their capacities to see their classroom behavior in the perspective of culture and time, from the point of view of historical and contemporary others, thereby clarifying for themselves and others the alternatives for action. The student teacher experience should provide aspiring teachers access to persons who can help initiate and sustain a process of critical inquiry." In essence, the wedding together of action research and practice in student teaching will give the young professionals increased skills for what lies ahead.

"...Learning that changes behavior is most likely to result when a person himself tries to improve a situation that makes a difference to him," according to Alex Perrodin. Because the nature of every student teacher's experience varies, each student teacher will be the one who initiates the action research subject to be investigated. The student teacher will collaborate with the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher as to suitable projects, possible methods, etc. Collaboration will better ensure that worthwhile investigations are being accomplished and that local issues and expertise are the foundations for these.

At the completion of the investigation, each student teacher will act as a consultant to his/her peer student teachers and will share his/her findings verbally or in writing or both at a seminar designed for providing feedback.

Action research projects done during student teaching will not be pure research or value-free research that will advance the levels of knowledge in the field of education. But it is believed they will help teachers develop critical reasoning about their practices, that teachers will better use

existing research which will lessen the gap between research and daily practice.

The objectives of Action Research are designed to form one component of the student teacher curriculum. Only when action research is integrated with the traditional-craft teaching experiences, the seminars, the journals and the conferences will its value to the whole become apparent and measurable.

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